

Learning to Be: An Arts-Based Hermeneutic Understanding of My Heroine's Journey

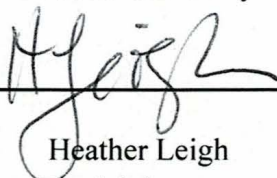
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Learning to Be: An Arts-Based Hermeneutic Understanding of My Heroine's Journey

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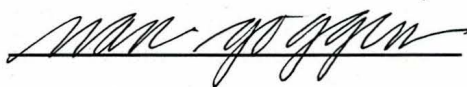


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ABSTRACT

This research explored the question of what can I learn about my life experiences through a feminist lens by integrating art, poetry, and stream of consciousness text into a hermeneutic circle process that explores *The Heroine's Journey*. The expected result was that I would have more insight about my own experiences while integrating my own heroine's journey into daily living. I used a six step, three round, hermeneutic circle approach that incorporated poetry, art in the form of an altered book, and stream of consciousness writings. I, the author/researcher, am a student in my second and final year of a master of art therapy program who was also the sole participant in this study. The results of this study showed that integrating arts-based layers to the hermeneutic circle led to increased self-awareness and deep insight into the feminine and masculine natures within myself. Through the experience of this project, I have created the framework of an approach that encourages self-exploration, societal struggles, and an on-going process of finding and making meaning.

Keywords: Hermeneutic circle, hermeneutics, The Heroine's Journey, feminism, arts-based research, altered books, self-study, stream of consciousness, free form poetry, self-discovery

DEDICATION

To strong women.

May we know them.

May we raise them.

May we be them.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

The catalyst to the creation of this study was my discovery of a book, titled *The Heroine's Journey: Women's Quest for Wholeness* (Murdock, 1990) and learning about its deep connection to the lives of many individuals throughout its almost 30-year existence. This brought forth the question of how this text could be adapted and incorporated into art therapy practice. The secondary purpose of this study was to validate first-person qualitative research, using a cyclical hermeneutic methodology which is a type of methodology that relies on processes over results. I, the researcher, am also the sole participant. This exploration into my own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors is valuable to this particular topic because the experience of a heroine's journey is deeply personal.

The Heroine's Journey is a book which features a 10-stage cyclical model of the archetypal psycho-spiritual journey which guides the development of identity of modern women living in a patriarchal society (Murdock, 1990). This text consists of different guide posts, anecdotes, and words of wisdom to further the reader's exploration of self. The purpose of using a feminist text in this research was to encourage potential discussion around societal factors into mental well-being and overall sense of self. There is also an emphasis in *The Heroine's Journey* on how this psycho-spiritual journey can be taken by, and be beneficial to, all genders (Murdock, 1990).

A heroine's journey, while not religious, puts a heavy emphasis on the spiritual and intuitive feelings of those taking the journey. This is why the hermeneutic philosophy was chosen as the research design for this study. Hermeneutics has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy but is commonly associated with Biblical interpretations (Kafle, 2011). However, the

true meaning of hermeneutics is broader and is the philosophy of conducting in-depth interpretation and understanding of a body of text (Martin, 1972). Hermeneutic researchers understand and embrace the phenomenological biases that come with personal interpretations and use that as the basis for their research.

In particular, this hermeneutic study used a hermeneutic circle which is a process of cycling through the body of text, analyzing both the whole text and parts of the text (Martin, 1972). This refers to the idea that understanding of the text as a whole can only be recognized by reference to the individual parts and the understanding of each individual part by orientation to the whole (Byrne-Armstrong, Higgs, & Horsfall, 2001). This is particularly apt for a heroine's journey because the use of a circle exists in both of these topics, the cyclical model of a heroine's journey, and the process of the hermeneutic circle.

The methodology for this study included creating and going through three "rounds" of a hermeneutic circle. Within the hermeneutic circle, a round refers to the six steps that create one part of the hermeneutic cycle. For this study, each round covered a portion of *The Heroine's Journey* text in relation to the whole text. A round consisted of six steps: (1) reading a portion of the text, (2) creating artwork in response to that portion of text, (3) verbally responding to the art work in a stream of consciousness, then documenting it in written form, (4) rereading the portion of text, (5) writing a free form poem response to the text, and, (6) writing a reflection on the entire cyclical process. What makes the hermeneutic circle process unique to other research designs is the adaptability of the data collection and the emphasis on the process of collection over the product of the data. Between each round, I reviewed the collection and in the final step of reflection, decided where to bring the study next, in this case, what portion of the text was most relevant to explore in the next round.

While hermeneutic studies are traditionally reading and writing based, this study utilized visual art, poetry, and stream of consciousness as well. Adding these forms of art was important so that this study could enrich the field of art-based research and art therapy. Song (2012), explored the benefits of visual journaling and written journaling and found, “that texts and images both portray information in complementary ways, and that utilizing both to convey a message instigates more thought provocation than either does in the absence of the other” (p. 68). Song’s (2012) study and this study used the same medium, an altered book, to create artwork. An altered book is operationally defined as “...a previously existing book that has been recycled into a new work of visual art using a variety of materials and processes” (Chilton, 2013, p. 458). In this study, the altered book was created by making a piece of artwork on different pages and then reflecting on them as its own entity and as a piece in the book. An altered book was chosen specifically for this study because of the parallels to the text-based origins of the hermeneutic methodology and how each piece of art can be contextualized within the whole of the book, just as the hermeneutic circle does through its process.

The overarching purpose of this study is to answer the following research question: What can I learn about my life experiences through a feminist lens by integrating art, poetry, and stream of consciousness text into a hermeneutic circle process that explores *The Heroine’s Journey*? I was specifically interested in how incorporating art-making as a layer of the hermeneutic circle process would provide additional interpretation and understanding of my personal heroine’s journey. I wanted to develop a framework which could give the field of art therapy an arts-based approach for guiding clients through their own heroine’s journey. This study is founded on the belief that adding art to the hermeneutic process of exploring a heroine’s journey can make it a richer experience that can be used by art therapists to help clients find their

unique paths, identify critical moments of their journey, and create meaning. By creating this arts-based self-reflective approach that can be used clinically, the field of art therapy will be enriched with another tool to help their clients.

I hypothesized that through the hermeneutic circle process, there will be a greater meaning and understanding of the self which will lead to a clearer understanding for clinical applications of this methodology. This goal is purposefully vague, because a heroine's journey does not encourage finding one answer to fit all, but instead encourages ongoing self-exploration and uncovering and questioning of the stories women have heard and incorporated unconsciously that may need to be reevaluated. From a feminist perspective, this reevaluation can only be done through the qualitative understanding of oneself. The journey that the heroine undertakes is a deeply personal one, and for that reason I have chosen to write this study in the first person. To write in the third person, to hide behind the title of participant, would create a disservice to the core beliefs of *The Heroine's Journey*.

Operational Definition of Terms

Altered book- “An altered book is a previously existing book that has been recycled into a new work of visual art using a variety of materials and processes” (Chilton, 2013, p. 458).

Art-making- The act of using creativity, imagination, and expression to create a visual representation of a time, place, person, or feeling (Song, 2012).

Feminine- Qualities attributed to traditionally female roles such as intuition, domestic values, and beauty (Murdock, 1990).

A heroine’s journey- A 10 stage cyclical model of the archetypal psycho-spiritual journey which guides the development of identity in modern women living in a patriarchal society (Murdock, 1990).

Hermeneutic circle- The process involved in a hermeneutic research design which consists of different levels of interpretation, meaning making, and understanding to move onto the next level (Zimmerman, 2015).

Masculine- Qualities attributed to traditionally male roles such as power, intelligence, and aggressiveness (Murdock, 1990).

Round- A layer of the hermeneutic circle which consists of six steps (Zimmerman, 2015).

Stream of consciousness- A body of unedited writing relaying a person's thoughts and conscious reactions as a natural continuous flow (Murdock, 1990).

CHAPTER II.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review describes the philosophy of hermeneutics and the design of a hermeneutic circle, provides a detailed review of all ten steps of *The Heroine's Journey*, and explains the role of an altered book as a tool for arts-based interpretation. Within these main topic areas, I explore concepts of understanding, meaning-making, feminism, identity, and the arts.

Hermeneutic Circle

Hermeneutics is the philosophy and research design for interpreting and understanding phenomenological experiences (Martin, 1972). The history of hermeneutics can be traced from Aristotle and Socrates to Medieval Biblical interpretations to modern philosophy and psychological studies (Zimmerman, 2015). The ancient Greeks believed that “an unexamined life, is not a human life,” which led them to create the first philosophy of personal meaning-making and naming it after their messenger god, Hermes (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 5). In the tenth century, the Christian church started to reuse the hermeneutic process to understand the Bible (Martin, 1972). The monks and priests of this time started to develop a process where they would fully conceptualize one book of the Bible, and then interpret it through the context of the entire religious text (Martin, 1972).

In modern day, hermeneutic philosophy is used to better understand bias in research (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). When conducting literature reviews, interpreting qualitative data, and communicating professional findings, there is an implicit interpretation that the researcher holds (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). In traditional research, this bias is

minimized as much as possible, but hermeneutic research designs encourage the identification of this bias and how it enhances the data from a real-world experience (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010).

Often in research, there is a focus on the findings and the interpretation of those results, but in hermeneutic designs there is an emphasis on an adaptable methodology that unites interpretation and research in a meaningful way (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The study of hermeneutics connects the written texts in one context and the interpretation of the texts within another context (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Hermeneutic design is well summarized by Kafle (2011):

Hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on subjective experience of individuals and groups. It is an attempt to unveil the world as experienced by the subject through their life world stories. This school [of thought] believes that interpretations are all we have and description itself is an interpretive process. To generate the best ever interpretation of a phenomenon it proposes to use the hermeneutic cycle. (p. 186-187)

This hermeneutic cycle, also called the hermeneutic circle, is a research method within the study of hermeneutics involves repeatedly cycling through studying the text as a whole, contextualizing that through a portion of the text, and then integrating the parts of the text back into the whole of the text (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The integration and understanding steps are typically done through written word, discussion, or mental processes (Kapitan, 2018). The end goal is to understand how each component is given context by understanding the whole text, and how the whole text is defined by its parts.

The hermeneutic circle provides no final understanding of the text, but a framework for constant re-interpretation based on a comprehensive examination of current life experiences (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). At its core, hermeneutics is about interpretation of texts both in academia and day-to-day life where texts can come in the form of thoughts, advertisements, social situations, or personal narratives (Zimmerman, 2015).

The Heroine's Journey

Unless otherwise stated, the following subsections are summarized and attributed to the work of Maureen Murdock (1990), *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*. Additional authors are cited throughout the body of the following section.

A heroine's journey is a cyclical model of the archetypal psycho-spiritual journey of modern women living in a patriarchal society. Murdock conceptualized *The Heroine's Journey* as a response to the Hero's Journey model presented by Joseph Campbell. Campbell is a mythologist who formed the concept of the Hero's Journey in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968), which outlines an archetypal story pattern he identified as commonly found in ancient myths and cultural folklore. This story pattern followed a protagonist hero through steps like "Call to Adventure," "Meeting the Mentor," and "Resurrection" (Campbell, 1968). This pattern is now used by modern day writers and directors to build the arc of the hero's journey into modern day culture, in such productions as Star Wars, Harry Potter, and Spiderman.

In an interview with Mary Davis of the Jung Society of Atlanta (2005), Murdock shared what spurred her to create *The Heroine's Journey*:

... the hero's journey model did not address the deep wounding of
the feminine for both men and women. Most women are 'fathers'

daughters' if not personally, then culturally. I saw in my therapy practice that women worked hard to make it in a man's world and then were often experiencing enormous spiritual aridity and deep wounding of their feminine nature. I met with Joe [Campbell] and showed him my map of the feminine journey. He said, 'Women don't need to make the journey, they are the place that everyone is trying to get to.' His response shocked me. It is true that in the mythological tradition, the feminine is the place people may be aspiring to integrate, but what I was aware of was that most of the women I knew and worked with were disconnected from our feminine nature. Our task was to reclaim the feminine for ourselves. (para. 3)

Murdock's book was written in 1990, during a period of feminism that was founded upon giving women an opportunity to choose between traditional feminine or masculine societal roles (Thwaites, 2017). This feminist movement was dubbed "The Third Wave" which followed the first wave of suffragettes in the 1920s and the second wave of sexual revolution in the 1960's and 1970's (Evans, 2016). The message of this text stems from an era of women who fought to alter how society views women, femininity, and intelligence that extends past numbers and facts (Walker, 1992). In the context of Third Wave feminism, *The Heroine's Journey* is a guide to Murdock's understanding of how women walk the modern-day journey in seeking to understand their identity and need for fulfillment in a masculine world.

Throughout her book, Murdock defined archetypal roles such as mother, father, masculine, and feminine. Nonetheless she made a point to say that these are not gendered but rather forces within the character of humanity—aspects of ourselves that we must recognize and

accept. The journey itself is comprised of ten stages that are cyclical in nature, but the heroine is also able to experience more than one stage at once, by experiencing more than one journey at the same time. For example, a heroine can be in a journey regarding her career where she's in the fifth step but also going through a journey regarding her role as a feminist and be in step nine. Furthermore, this journey is not restricted to age. The heroine can be 12 when she starts and not move on to the following steps until age 40, or she could start at age 25 and go through the ten steps by the time she is 35.

Murdock uses the metaphor of the Celtic Christian model of the triple Goddess to explain the idea that a heroine's journey is not age restricted. The model of the triple Goddess represents three stages of a woman's life – maiden, mother, and crone. This philosophy highlights the importance of each stage of life in its uniqueness and simultaneously as part of universal femininity. A married woman can still be in the maiden stage if she embodies youth, new beginnings, and innocence. Likewise, a mother figure is not limited to birthing children but can be a mother to ideas, projects, orphaned souls, or her environment. For example, the spirit of the mother moon represents, fulfillment, power, and sexuality. Furthermore, a woman need not be elderly to embody wisdom, assertiveness, and the acceptance of the crone figure. This triple Goddess is visualized as three moon phases in succession from left to right – the waxing crescent, the full moon, and the waning crescent correspond to the maiden, mother, crone, respectively. The stages of a heroine's journey are as follows.

1. Separation from the Feminine. The first stage of a heroine's journey involves a separation from feminine values, such as motherhood, empathy, creativity, and sensuality, in reaction to our patriarchal society viewing these traits as weak, dependent, and unnecessary. This rejection of femininity starts with a heroine's devaluation of her mother, or mother-figure, and

demonizing her as manipulative, bitter, and overall powerless. Murdock wrote that young girls look to their mothers for how to function in society and when mothers feel powerless and demeaned by a patriarchal society; young women start to feel humiliated about being female.

The heroine develops a bitterness and hatred towards the feminine and maternal figures in her life. She witnesses the disdain and condescending tone that those in power, typically males, take with those figures and decides she would rather be on the side of authority. This separation often happens unconsciously from birth but can manifest consciously when the heroine is faced with problems of choosing a career, getting married, or raising children.

Murdock explained that in the effort to separate from her inherent feminine nature, the heroine overlooks the positive aspects of femininity, which can be a caring, nurturing, life-giving figure. This separation, often unconscious, creates a deep divide between the heroine and her maternal qualities that will need to be bridged and repaired to complete the journey.

2. Identification with the Masculine and Gathering of Allies. One of the core reasons that separation from the feminine occurs is because our society values masculine roles, values, and traits. When the heroine sees the glamour, power, and recognition provided to the masculine figures in her life, she is enticed. “Most women seek power and authority either by becoming like men or by becoming liked by men.” (p. 37). This identification is not a wholly negative action. The transition from being fused with the mother to honoring traits that are revered in our male-dominated society is important for fostering independence. Some of the positive traits sought by the heroine at this stage are decisiveness, courage, discipline, and power.

Where the identification with the masculine can go awry is when the heroine has an absent, disingenuous, or negative masculine ally in her life. This dynamic can foster a need for

perfection to prove herself as worthy of male affection. It can also create a sense of self-paralysis that the heroine can never make it in the masculine world and seeks to serve masculine figures and align with the power they embody.

3. Road of Trials and Gathering of Allies. The road of trials is when the heroine meets her demons, and they manifest both internally and externally. The external demons can arise in the form of unsupportive parents, teachers, partners, or bosses, telling her that she cannot possibly succeed in a man's world and that there are other more qualified people ahead of her on this journey. These demons can lead her through developmentally expected life challenges like marriage, degrees, promotions, and awards. Murdock writes that the most powerful external demon is that of society, which tells the woman that she can do anything she wants, but only within the choices that society has set up for her – choices that are traditionally feminine, as defined in Western American society, like mother, teacher, or nurse.

Her internal demons' surface as thoughts of fear, self-doubt, and indecisiveness. In Western society, there is a myth of feminine dependency where "feminine" becomes a dirty word that means needing to take care of someone. Women are taught at a young age to anticipate others' needs, and while, at first, they may expect their needs to be taken care of, and in turn, they learn that when they ask for a need to be met, they are perceived as whiny, demanding, and dependent on others. Consequently, a woman can start to feel shame about having needs at all.

4. Finding the Illusory Boon of Success. At this point in her journey, the heroine feels strong in her role, she knows her capabilities within society, and she's found the metaphorical treasure of her journey. She has received the power and success of the father held world that she sought out to gain. She may start to feel envy from other women, those who have not started

their journey or feel that they do not need to. Much like her male cohorts, she dismisses them as weak-willed and lazy.

The heroine's life may look like a position of power at work but also can include marriage and children. Murdock explained that when the heroine experiences motherhood at this stage of the journey, it's often a reaction to wanting to be nothing like the mother they separated from at the beginning of her journey. "Unfortunately," Murdock wrote, "in an effort to not be anything like their mothers, many young women became like men... measuring their self-esteem, self-definition, and self-worth against male standards of production" (p. 64). This initial external validation is exhilarating and makes the heroine feel part of a special club where only a select few girls are allowed. But as the heroine continues, she finds that there is never an end to the expected success, the masculine world demands more and more of her, and with each move she loses feminine values. The feeling of never being good enough grows until she may start to wonder what the point of this external world is if her internal world is dying. To combat this discomfort, she seeks out more acts of heroism and achievement to soothe her ego.

The persona that the heroine shows to the world is that of a woman who has left behind femininity and is successful in the 'man's world'. Murdock calls this "The Great Pretender" (p. 65). The heroine is pushing herself to constantly stay busy and to keep the mask of success in place so that she cannot feel the loss of control that is ruminating in her core. Murdock explains that the masculine energy has become distorted and oppressive, constantly keeping the heroine on her toes so that she cannot discover the source of her victimization.

5. Awakening to Feelings of Spiritual Death. The heroine that experiences the beginning of spiritual death is someone who might be telling their friends and family that they

feel tired, depressed, or burnt out. She may start to experience chronic colds, insomnia, or have stomach problems. She is pushed so long across this heroic path that when these accomplishments and accolades come her way, she feels surprised when there is still a feeling of something missing from her life. Murdock explained that while some women still have enough feminine spirit to describe the feelings of loss and emptiness, many masculine driven women do not and instead turn to drugs, alcohol, or over-working themselves into a nervous breakdown.

The heroine at this point needs to realize that the heroic journey she has tried to live by never took her physical and spiritual limitations into account, nor did the heroes she surrounded herself with care about her feminine well-being. There is a distinct point where the heroine realizes that she has been tricked, used, and now betrayed by the masculine world. This masculinity told her that if she followed the goal-driven world she lives in, i.e., if she was a “good girl”, then the father figures would take care of her.

When she tries to let her masculine defined persona slip, to say “no” to a new project, promotion, or responsibility that she does not want to do, the masculine world replies with “You’re just not up to the challenge.” This admonition is hard for anyone to hear, but particularly to the heroine, who up to this point has only sought validation and approval externally from males. The feeling of emptiness begins to grow, strengthened by the implication that she is letting others down – that they now think less of her.

6. Initiation and Descent to the Goddess. In this part of the journey, the heroine has a realization of the pain she’s going through, often marked by a substantial loss. The loss can be of a relationship, a role, her livelihood, or a near loss of life. This loss is the catalyst to the heroine’s symbolic trip to the underworld to meet the dark Goddess, a place filled with disillusion, grief,

rage, and confusion. In Western society, a woman is told to smile, swallow her feelings, and please those around her. When the journey to the underworld occurs, the heroine must reclaim the dark Goddess in herself that allows her to assert herself without fear of being judged as disagreeable, ugly, or a 'bitch.'

The descent to the Goddess is not for external approval or achievement, but to experience the full feminine cycle; to learn how to accept the darkness. Accepting the darkness has the positive benefit of allowing the heroine to find meaning and wisdom in death and suffering. To descend is not a decision made lightly. The heroine has filled her life with busyness to avoid unsafe emotions that lurk in the back of her mind. Murdock wrote:

A woman moves down into the depths to reclaim the parts of herself that split off when she rejected the mother and...the feminine. To make this journey a woman puts aside her fascination with the intellect and games of the cultural mind, and acquaints herself, perhaps for the first time, with her body, her emotions, her sexuality, her intuition, her images, her values, and her mind (p. 90).

7. Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine. After her descent to the underworld and her understanding of the dark Goddess within, the heroine is pulled towards recoupling with the positive aspects of her femininity. For example, if the heroine discounted her mother as superstitious, overly-religious, and old fashioned, she may start to value the intuitive, mysterious, magical ways of her femininity.

The heroine may have a desire to seek out domestic activities like gardening, ceramics, or cooking. She might have a strong urge to be touched, to reclaim her sexuality, something she has been actively told to keep hidden because expression of desire or lust is shameful. The

patriarchal society has demeaned women by calling them sluts, seductresses, or succubus for centuries along with internalized feelings of shame about body size, sexual desires, and menstruation. Murdock argued that these are the messages women have received that elicit this negative self-talk, not the intuitive messages. The heroine will start to reclaim her body from the society that rejected her femininity by consciously adopting new body-positive practices such as conscious nutrition, exercise, bathing, rest, lovemaking, and spiritual healing. As the integrated feminine comes back into the heroine's consciousness she may feel renewed by color, light, smell, taste, and touch in the world around her. The heroine's next undertaking is to learn that "Being is not a luxury; it is a discipline" (p. 83).

8. Healing the Mother/Daughter Split. This stage does not require a healing with the heroine's birth mother, but it often involves grieving the original rejection of the feminine and reclaiming her own body, wisdom, intuition, and creativity. There is a need to connect with other feminine energies at this point in the journey, to recreate the mothering and mothered feelings that were rejected earlier. The nature of the mother/daughter relationship is also connected to how the heroine connects to Mother Earth and how femininity is viewed within her culture.

When a severe split occurs between the mother and daughter spirits, women may seek out healing in the experience of divine ordinariness. This could take the form of seeing the acts that she performs each day such as washing dishes, drinking coffee, or taking a walk as divine, beautiful, and profound. These everyday acts ground the heroine into her physical and spiritual home, connecting her to the loving nature of the inner feminine.

At this stage, it can seem to the outside world that the heroine has renounced all masculine values and swung to the other extreme of the masculine or feminine dichotomy in this

time of healing. The final two stages address this need for integration between masculine and feminine.

9. Healing the Wounded Masculine. At this point, the heroine realizes that she needs to accept the masculine energy that she previously lived her life by, but only on her terms. This masculine identity was the one who told her to ignore her health and feelings, refused to accept her limits, and told her to tough it out and never rest. This is also the identity that our world sees as valuable. Murdock stated that in this patriarchal society, "...anything worthwhile has to be difficult, concrete, and quantifiable" (p. 16). The heroine needs to make peace with the fact that utilizing her masculine energy will get her accolades in masculine circles, but she risks her health and well-being in letting it overtake her again.

In this part of her journey, the heroine receives little recognition or applause from the external world. However, there is merit in the assertiveness, productivity, and honesty the masculine energy provides. Just as the heroine accepted the good and bad within the feminine energy, she must understand how the masculine took over but also find the light in what brought her to the descent. The heroine must use her caring and empathic feminine energy to heal the wounded and strained masculine energy in our culture; in other words, finding the man with heart within the heroine.

The heroine can recognize that the tyrant of overextending oneself leads to a breaking point. She now appreciates the need that the masculine fulfills and understands why she lost herself in the masculine before, so her challenge in this stage is to strike a balance. The transformation of the shadow tyrant into a "man with heart" (p. 155) occurs through the integration of both feminine and masculine to become the one true self.

10. Integration of the Masculine and Feminine. The current world culture is one that promotes polar identities. In a dualistic society, the “other” is viewed as something to change, control, or destroy. This dualistic mindset creates a worldview of “control or be controlled” that is internalized by both majorities and minorities in a culture. When the heroine begins to fully integrate the feminine and masculine energies acquired on her journey, she can see past these constructed binaries. Instead, the heroine begins to form a circular perspective of connectivity between all beings and energies. The circle as a shape of holistic equality has its roots in primeval mandalas, King Arthur’s round table, and the sacristy of the full moon in multiple cultures. The union of masculine and feminine involves knowing wounds, blessing them, and letting them go in a continuous cycle of death and rebirth.

This culminating integration includes the masculine, the feminine, the discarded and replaced personas, and the accepted dark sides of all parts of the heroine. It is said that the masculine seeks perfection and the feminine craves completion but these two cannot coincide. If the heroine is perfect, then she is incomplete because a complete self is one that accepts the imperfections as part of herself. If the heroine is complete then she cannot be perfect for the evil, dark, shameful, and imperfect parts of her must be part of the completion. In response, Murdock wrote, “Perhaps it is best to be content with something less than perfection and something less than completion. Perhaps we need to be more willing to accept life as it comes” (p. 160). The fruition of this journey is for the heroine to no longer blame or seek the other, for she is the other and herself.

However, this culminating phase of *The Heroine’s Journey* is not a concrete ending point; the cycle of a heroine’s journey can keep repeating over and over and over again. By the time each cycle is over, the heroine isn’t finished so much as she is stronger than she was before.

Similar, to a piece of art that has been painted over and over again, each wash of paint brings new strength and weight to the piece. By contrast, a hero's journey, as defined by Campbell (1968), is more linear; it ends when the hero has become king and married the princess.

Altered Books

An altered book is a form of art where the artist takes a preexisting bound book and changes the cover and pages using a variety of materials (Cobb & Negash, 2010). The book serves as a canvas for the art, in contrast to a traditional blank canvas, sketchbook, or journal. Altered books allow the words and images provided by the original author to be integrated into the art (Cobb & Negash, 2010). Chilton (2007) described the large and varying types of materials that can be used to create altered books:

Artists can draw or paint on the pages or cover of the book, and add or remove text, poetry, words, and images. The book can be adorned with stamps, stickers, fabric, leather, beads, wire, twigs or found objects. Niches can be cut into the book, to create shadow-box effects. Elaborate glazing, image transfers, envelopes, pockets, doors or pop-up features can be created inside the pages of the book.

(p.1)

In creating an altered book, the artist can use the pages of a book as blank canvases contained within one bound book, or alter the physical structure of the book by sculpting it into a different form by folding, burning, cutting, or carving the pages (Chilton, 2013). Song (2012) compared her work with altered books to traditional journals and found that, "...every part of the journal was constantly updated with new layers of content aesthetically and textually, much like the process of working and reworking a piece of art rather than writing entries in a journal..." (p.

69). Thus, the use of art-based mediums provide a wide range of adaptations not possible with the conventional written word. In relation to this research study, the process of altering a book provides a parallel to the hermeneutic research design. The layered process of creating an altered book, the process of going into and out of the artwork, mirrors the work done with text in a hermeneutic circle.

Metaphorically, a book is an object that throughout history and across cultures has been heavy with symbolism (Chilton, 2007). The book can symbolize knowledge, power, truth, scholarly pursuits, learning, libraries, or wisdom (Chilton, 2007). In many religions, there is a holy book such as the Bible, the Torah, or the Quran which contains spiritual knowledge and guidance for followers of those religions (Chilton, 2007). The book is a powerful archetype across all of humanity whose purpose is to inform the reader. (Chilton, 2007). To alter a book in western culture is a rebellious act that subverts the rules placed upon much of society (Chilton, 2007). An altered book changes the intended purpose of the original author and delivers a new message from a new narrator (Chilton, 2007). This mirrors the process that Murdock followed when subverting the established Hero's Journey, by rebelling against Campbell's voiced objection and finding her own symbolism within stories of heroines.

CHAPTER III. Methodology

Design of the Study

I conducted a study using a hermeneutic circle which is a process of cycling through a body of text by analyzing both the whole text and then parts of the text and then the whole again (Martin, 1972). This idea is founded on the belief that understanding of the text as a whole can only be recognized by reference to the individual parts and the understanding of each individual part by orientation to the whole (Byrne-Armstrong, Higgs, & Horsfall, 2001).

Location and Time of Study

This study was conducted in a private home office in a large Midwestern metropolitan city over five weeks during the Spring of 2019. The six steps outlined in the data collection section below were performed weekly over three days, with Step 1 completed on the first day, Steps 2 and 3 completed on the second day, and Steps 4, 5, and 6 completed on the third day.

Participant

I, as the author and researcher of this paper, am also the sole participant. I am a twenty-four-year-old art therapy graduate student enrolled in my final year with the Master of Art Therapy Program at Herron School of Art and Design. Because of the overlapping roles of participant and researcher, there was no informed consent, IRB review, or recruitment materials required for this study.

Data Collection

The data collection followed a hermetic circle design using six layers of interpretation and understanding. The six steps, or layers, described below complete “a round.”

1. The first layer involved reading a portion of *The Heroine's Journey* text that was selected.
2. The second layer was the use of art-making as a tool to explore my unconscious, subjective experience of the text read in the first layer. I created one spread per week in an altered book format. A ‘spread’ is defined as a chronological left and right page that are next to each when the open book lies flat. I limited myself to the following materials: felt tip pens and markers, watercolor paint, oil pastels, sewing needles, sewing thread, magazine cutouts, and a glue stick.
3. The third layer was to create a verbal stream-of-consciousness reflection in response to the artwork. I used Dragon NaturallySpeaking, a voice transcription software to record this layer by responding to the prompt: “How does this art relate to this stage of *The Heroine's Journey*?” The full stream of consciousness can be found for rounds 1, 2, and 3 in Appendices B, C, and D respectively. Quotes were chosen by personal significance to the meaning making and personal insight discovered.
4. For the fourth layer, I re-read the section of *The Heroine's Journey* selected in layer one and identified new understandings of the text.
5. During the fifth layer, I reviewed layers one through four and reflected on the whole experience in the form of a reflective free form poem.
6. The sixth layer is an informal data analysis of the previous layers. This analysis was

conducted by reflecting on the meaning derived from this round and identified the selection of text for the next round.

Three rounds were completed for this study. The first round completed the “Separation from the Feminine” step of *The Heroine’s Journey*, the second round looked at the entire text, and the third round focused in on the seventh step, “Urgent Yearning to Connect with the Feminine.”

Because the hermeneutic circle uses the process meaning-making and interpretation to guide the research, these topics were not chosen in advance. Rather, they were chosen after each round, based on the collected data and the subsequent analysis of that data.

The use of an altered book was chosen due to the symbolic nature of creating a personal narrative about my own heroine’s journey and translating that into a visual representation of a story in the form of a book. The book selected was a text found at a garage sale in my neighborhood. The book is titled *Skin and Bones* by Thorne Smith (1933). This book was chosen at random. I had no prior associations with the story or the author. The rationale for the choice of an unknown book was to lessen bias towards certain passages, words, or illustrations I would have if using a book that I was previously familiar. As recommended by Brazelton (2004), the book was prepped before the start of the study by removing every other page of the book and then gluing every other remaining page together to create a sturdy place to create a visual narrative.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this study include the 3-week time frame placed upon the data collection which only allowed for three rounds of the hermeneutic circle. This timeframe was

especially limiting for this research because there are ten steps of a heroine's journey; to move in and out of the entire book, as the hermeneutic design intends, would take upwards of 20 weeks, with each week alternating between a step and the whole text.

The historical context of *The Heroine's Journey* is also an important factor in this study. This book was written in 1990 during feminism's third wave which focused on destroying stereotypical gender roles and expanding feminism to include women of all races, classes, and backgrounds (Evans, 2016). At the time of this study, however, there is an undefined feminist movement that is associated with millennials and technology (Thwaites, 2017). This current movement rallies against such issues as sexual harassment on the street and in the workplace, rape culture, and integrating LGBTQIA+ identities into feminism (Young, 2019). This context is culturally different than the historical time period when the text was written. In addition, my interpretation of the text is constructed through the lens of my cultural/historical context at the time of the study. These contextual aspects could be seen as limiting the study, or as enriching the study by showing the continued relevance of the text.

A further limitation is the metacognition, or knowledge of one's own thoughts and desired outcomes. This limitation is inherent to the research design in which I am also the sole participant. I have an implicit expected/anticipated outcome and the dual roles may interfere with obtaining unbiased results.

One of the delimitations is the single participant which was chosen for this study as a starting point for future research and to delve deeper into meaning of one individual. Also, limiting the art materials I could use was a conscious decision made to promote creativity

without overthinking material choice or spending an abundance of allotted time choosing materials.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

These results will contain three rounds, each consisting of six steps, as outlined in the methodology.

Round 1: Separation from the Feminine.

Step 1. Reading the Text. I read the chapter titled “Separation from the Feminine” in *The Heroine’s Journey* (Murdock, 1990) which spanned pages 13-28.

Step 2. Step 2. Artwork.

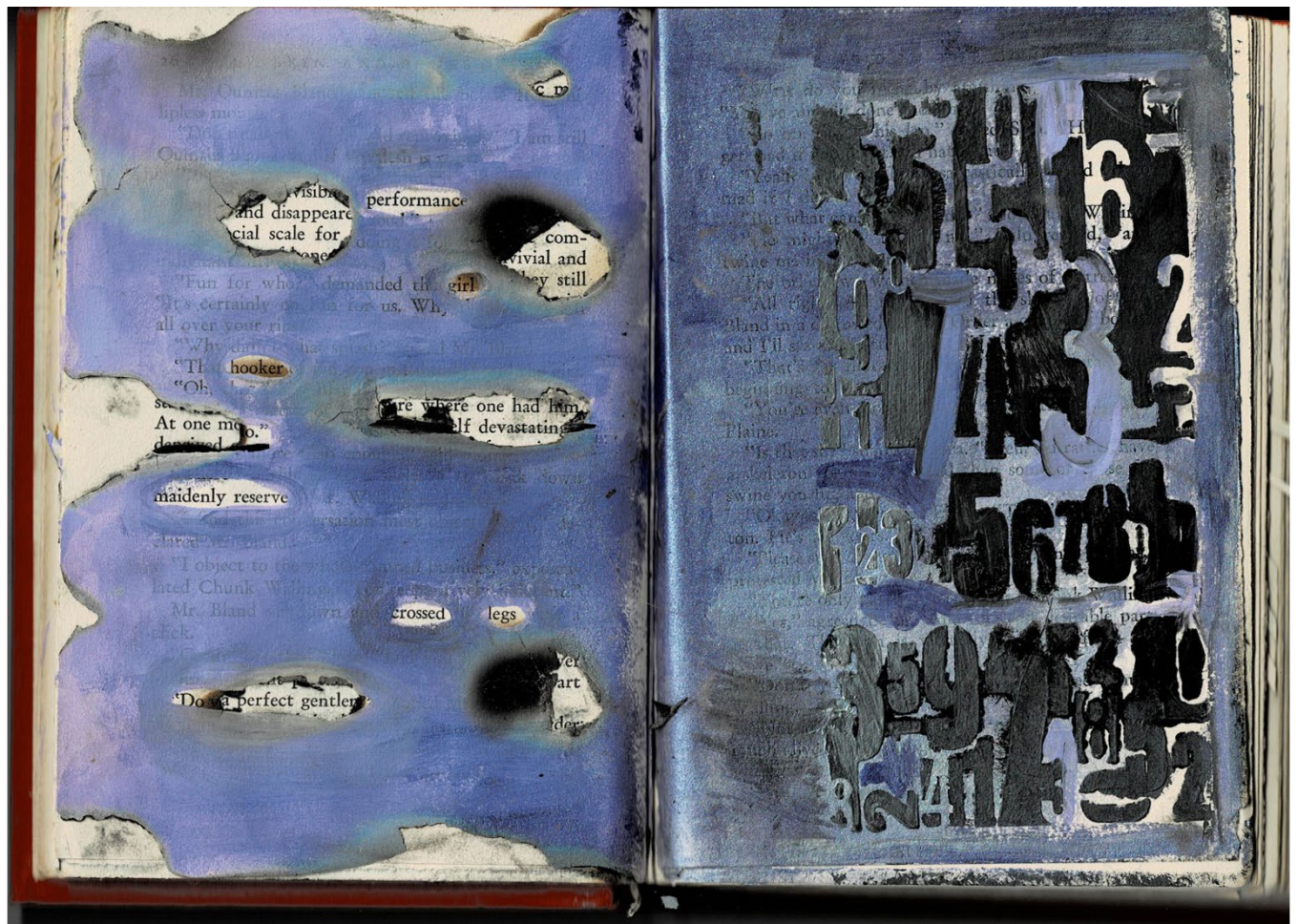


Figure 1: Two pages in a book, on the left side is light purple wash with the edges burned out and several burned holes in the page. The words ‘maidenly reserve’, ‘performance’, and ‘crossed legs’ are circled and free from burning. On the right side is a darker purple wash with stenciled black and silver numbers leading into the right edge of the page.

Step 3. Stream of Consciousness. See Appendix A for the full stream of consciousness text.

“The heroine’s journey would explain my hatred of pink and of all things ‘girly’ because at a young age I learned that women are weak, and women wear pink and so pink is weak.”

“Doing this whole thesis is a way of practicing that masculine ways of thinking- quantitative and concrete and numerical and orderly- are not as high and mighty as I was taught in my research degree.”

“I have so many feelings, how could that ever be research? How can these numbers I painted and sponged onto the sheet be equally as important as the river of thoughts and emotions that run through me?”

“Am I being selfish by studying myself? Is that not what the Heroine’s Journey preaches? To learn to come back inside the body, to feel the femininity given to me by my own mother and to learn, to discipline myself to simply be?”

“I don’t think I need to be studying this first step. I lived this first step. I recognized this first step already. Where do I go next?”

Step 4. Re-reading the Text. I re-read the chapter titled “Separation from the Feminine” in *The Heroine’s Journey* (Murdock, 1990) which spanned pages 13-28.

Step 5. Free Verse Poetic Response.

All that is earnest is not girls,
Girls, by all accounts are frail.
Girls, by all accounts will fail.
Girls would like to believe they are more.

How pleased and strong are menfolk!
Do menfolk make you shiver?
Do they?

How strong are heroines!
"Breathe", said the heroines,
And "breathe" then "breathe" again

Fragile glass and solid rock
You will find your home between
Those bookend the journey
Those contain being to be.

Step 6. Data Analysis. In my artwork, my separation from the feminine is reflected by the fact that the left page is burnt, and certain words are shown like crossed legs and maidenly reserve. And then moving forward stenciled numbers so carefully lead to the rest of my journey. Even in this “Separation from the Feminine Artwork” the second step, “Identification with the Masculine”, appears in the form of those quantitative symbols. I felt uncomfortable with this artwork. The process of creation was disjointed. This led me to wonder why I was going through this separation when I had recognized the fatal flaws in doing so.

In the stream of consciousness, I identified that my separation from the feminine started at birth when I born into a society that prizes masculine traits and, in a house full of masculine energy, I was not inclined to question whether femininity was worth anything. This research paper pushes me out of my comfort zone of quantitative analyses and into the soft-sciences of art, feminism, and emotions. I often feel that my heart has completed my heroine’s journey while my brain has not; meaning that my mind is still holding onto the concrete realities, but my intuition has started to influence my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors more towards accepting things that may not be able to be statistically proven.

Through my rereading of the text, I realized that I was in the middle of this journey, not the first step. Pushing myself to understand a mindset I was no longer a part of was not something that fulfills my research question or furthers the hermeneutic process. I asked myself if it was valid to push myself into exploring a step that I no longer resonate with and the answer that arose was “no”. The meaning derived from this process was that the heroine’s journey can be reflected upon, but to try and relive it could regress the journey before it is completed.

Finally, when I wrote my poem, I found myself trying to console the little girl that was mentioned in the stream of consciousness by telling her to breathe and to trust this journey will

find a home at the end of the path. It was this final poetic response that leads me to believe that the meaning I've derived here is my need to return to the "home." In this context, I believe I am telling myself to return to looking at the whole before exploring another part of the journey. I want to find the home base of where I am in the journey right now. The step that I am experiencing now will represent a small oasis outside of my comfort zone. Because I'm not led to a certain step in particular after completing the first round, I believe returning to the text as a whole would be most beneficial to finding that stage. Deriving meanings from the entire script puts the stages back into context, which is something the hermeneutic design encourages.

Round 2: The Heroine's Journey.

Step 1. Reading the Text. I read the chapters titled "Introduction" and "Conclusion" in *The Heroine's Journey* (Murdock, 1990) which spanned pages 1-12 and pages 184-187.

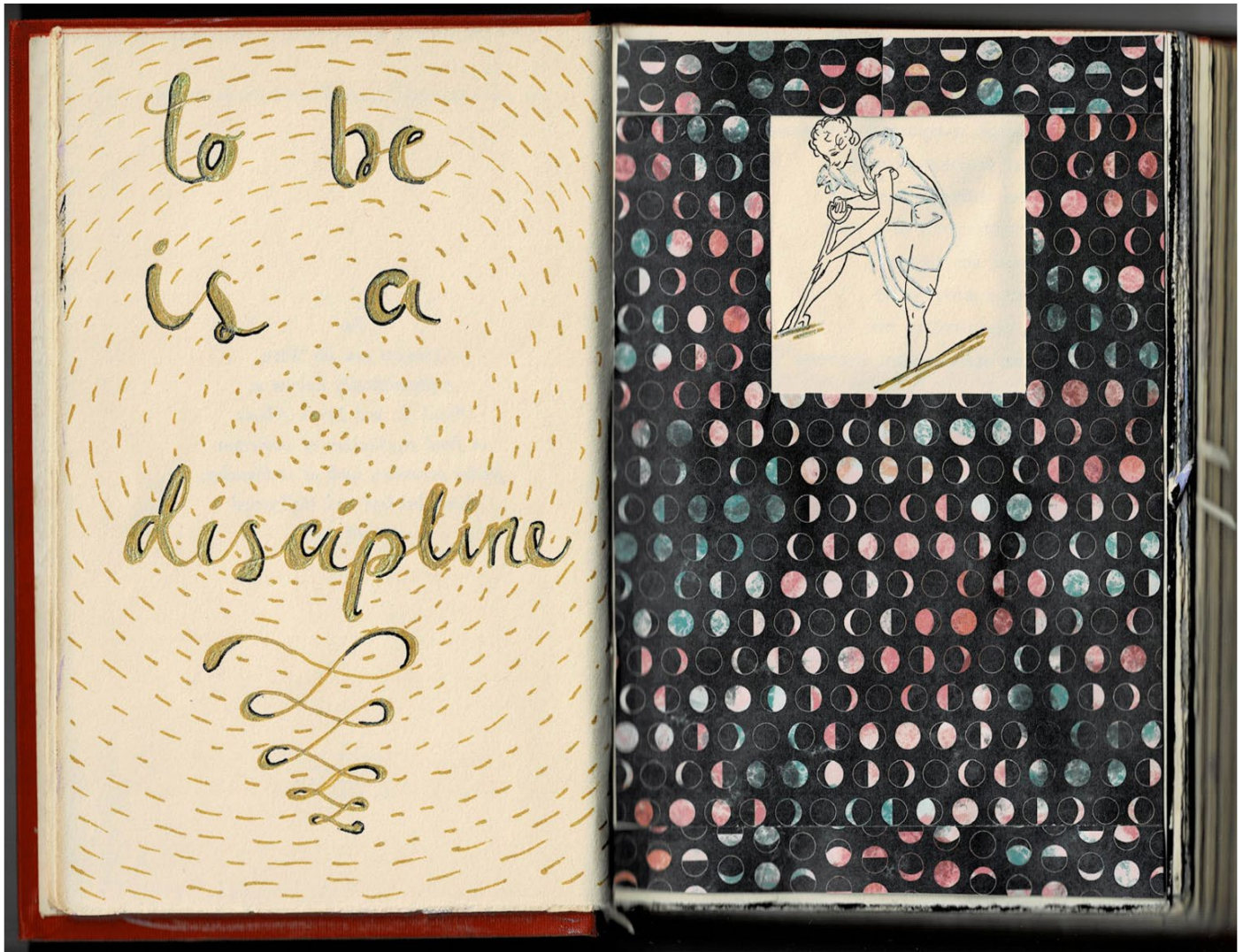
Step 2. Artwork.

Figure 2: Two pages in a book, on the left side is written 'to be is a discipline' in gold script letting and concentric dotted circles filling up the page. On the right side is an illustration from the book of a woman digging with a shovel, this is framed by cut out pieces of paper decorated with repeated moon phases in pink, white, and blue.

Step 3. Stream of Consciousness. See Appendix B for the full stream of consciousness text.

“The end is supposed to be finding balance between masculine and feminine.”

“I want to recognize that when I hear someone say, ‘There’s no statistics to back it up.’ Or ‘it’s anecdotal’ about something, that I don’t dismiss it immediately but recognize the inherent value in life experiences and opinions.”

“... I know that it’s easy for me to flood when I let go of too much structure and concrete thinking. That’s where the balance comes in, I suppose I do feel like I’ve realized the detrimental effects of the initial rejection of feminine ideals but going from one extreme to another is just as toxic.”

“I imagine that the balance will be wise, adaptable, and humble. I want to be living the balance, or at least know what the balance looks like.”

“I want to be comfortable just being, and Murdock does state that it is a discipline to do so, to just be is not a luxury. And with any discipline, there’s going to be a balance.”

Step 4. Re-reading the Text. I re-read the chapters titled “Introduction” and “Conclusion” in *The Heroine’s Journey* (Murdock, 1990) which spanned pages 1-12 and pages 184-187.

Step 5. Free Verse Poetic Response.

I wish I could have never asked the question
Like all those who don’t seek an answer
I dream of knowing the unknown
But I am tired of seeking and dissatisfaction
I used to be able to seek until I found the end
I now seek the discipline to live without answers
This journey will have no holy grail

Step 6. Data Analysis. The page I chose for this layer has an illustration original to the book of a woman shoveling into the ground which mirrors how I have digging into meaning and femininity. The drawing only shows her digging a very shallow level, the first lump of dirt. I wonder what is below her, and when she will feel complete digging. This depiction of physical labor contrasts with the quote that I chose to encompass the entire heroine’s journey which is “To be is a discipline”. This is a rework of Murdock’s quote, “Being is not a luxury; it is a discipline” (1990, p. 83). To me, this quote means that finding peace in neither moving forwards or backwards takes practice, insight, and willpower. Understanding that a routine can form these habits of peace I chose the moon phases to show the constant change of life. The moon will wane and wax in the same stages over and over until the end of time. Life will continue to balance

between masculine and feminine until the end of life. However, both take enormous power. This is seen in the tides and gravity of the moon and in the arduous journey one must take to find the balance between fact and emotion.

The poem was the piece of reflection that caught me off guard and embodied the steps I feel I've already moved past. I recognize the spiritual aridity that is present in maintaining a masculine façade all my life, and I recognize that the journey can't end with a prize like it does in the hero stories we're told. Life moves on and on, whether we think we're done or not. The questions I must pose to myself is that when I feel that my journey is completed, do I actively seek a new one or do I challenge myself to find peace in the stillness of life? That's not to say that there won't be more heroine or hero journeys in my future, but instead to recognize if I seek those journeys to gain acclaim or if I utilize them to achieve peace.

After doing this process of finding meaning, I believe the step that fits my current place in life is the seventh step, the urgent yearning to reconnect with the feminine. I have taken a large step in reconnecting with the feminine already by producing this thesis that is qualitatively written in the first person, something that is taboo in traditional masculine research circles; but it still causes me anxiety. I want to dive whole heartedly into it but there is still deep-seated shame within me when I abandon the ways of masculinity.

Round 3: Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine.

Data Collection.

Step 1. Reading the Text. I read the chapter titled “Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine” in *The Heroine’s Journey* (Murdock, 1990) which spanned pages 110-129.

Step 2. Artwork.

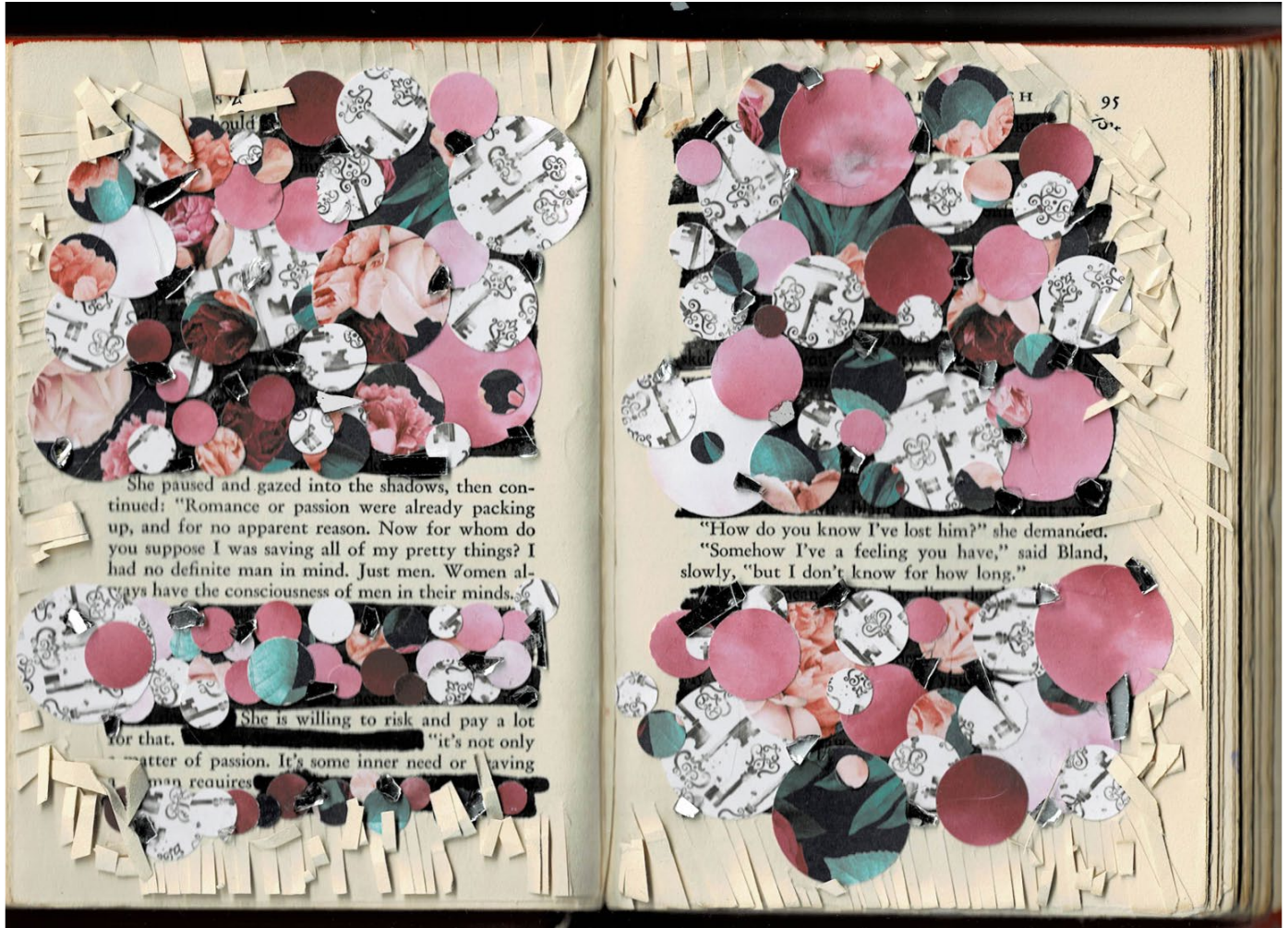


Figure 3: Two pages in a book, both sides have several circles of varying sizes cut out of scrap book paper. The scrap book paper is decorated with images of black and white keys, pink gradients, or pink roses. These circles are placed around certain passages in the book and pieces of broken mirrors are placed on top of the circles in random places. The edges of the book were cut into a fringe pattern and bent inward.

Step 3. Stream of Consciousness.

See Appendix C for the full stream of consciousness text.

“...I felt a connection and drive to create this piece and understand it.”

“I can follow my intuition and lean heavily into that feminine energy that encourages me to stop planning and just create. It makes me feel like I have finally found the stage that relates the most to my current life experiences, instead of trying to reach backwards or forwards into my life.”

“There is still a lot of ingrained shame about wanting to use pink and flowers and quote on quote unprofessional, unscholarly language in this thesis.”

“I have had to remind myself that nontraditional means, or feminine soft research, is just as valid.”

“Ideally the end of my journey would show me a way to have thoughts that don’t need to be corrected, that I am integrated between concrete and fluidity easily...Can anyone say they control their thoughts completely? Is it enough to catch myself after an unhelpful thought or do I need to eliminate those all together?”

“I have learned that the end of a journey isn’t always going to be clear cut.”

“I guess this is me reaching into the next stages, the thoughts of what the healing the masculine, finding the man with heart, as Murdock says.”

Step 4. Re-reading the Text. I re-read the chapter titled “Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine” in *The Heroine’s Journey* (Murdock, 1990) which spanned pages 110-129.

Step 5. Free Verse Poetic Response.

Mother Earth, Father Sky

Mother Moon, Father Sun

I really believed

I would have fought you always

Yet our journeys are woven

Souls and souls facing life

But my pulse was just a ghost

There was a history

It hurts me as a wish unfilled

I turn back to find my thread

Of sun rays and moon beams

Step 6. Data Analysis. While my book choice was random, there are several poignant passages that stuck out to me while creating this artwork. Specifically, on the right side of the spread, there is the quote,

“How do you know I’ve lost him? She demanded, “Somehow I’ve a feeling you have,” said Bland, slowly, “but I don’t know for how long.” (Smith, 1933, p. 95)

This leads me to believe that these questions of masculine and feminine, soft and hard, men and women, are human nature to explore and most books will touch upon this, creating a supportive canvas for the artwork needed to do this hermeneutic process.

According to the text, there is no transition for the heroine where she still feels a connection to the masculine. However, real life seems to present differently. There was no single life-changing event that occurred to me that flipped the switch from feminine to masculine to feminine to integration. Currently, I feel as though there is a blurred mix of both ideals fighting for my attention and values. My stream of consciousness shows this blurring of my insecurities about using soft language in a research paper and speaking about personal beliefs and feelings rather than generalizable examination.

However, the poem I created posed the question of if I’m still holding desperately onto the ingrained masculine values, does that mean I’m not even at the yearning to reconnect with the feminine? In *The Heroine’s Journey*, Murdock talked about the ways in which the heroine might appear to be reconnecting through domestic work, self-care, and slower approaches to life, but doesn’t define what level of masculinity is still present at this stage. My poem shows a lot of areas that are in between feminine and masculine, but there is no integration until the completion

of the journey according to Murdock. I hope that when I reach a clearer stage of integration that it becomes less of a battle and more of an adaptable flow between the two.

The meaning derived from this process was that a heroine's journey is not going to look or feel exactly as Murdock described. My journey has more grey areas and I cannot turn the page to a new chapter as easily as I can while reading the text. These steps are guideposts, not paths. I think if I were to continue, I would explore to see if I am at the integration of masculine and feminine stage, the final stage. I do not know if I have fully let go of the hold the masculine energy has over me enough to start the integration. It is still a novelty to me when I recognize and appreciate the moments where I can embrace the feminine. I want to understand how, and possibly why, I delve so deep into a one side or the other when the heroine's journey, as a whole, encourages the end goal to be integration between treading water and diving.

CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION

This study is unique in that the results section is part of the methodology, where the sixth step of each round was the reflective results that led to the next step. This discussion will review the hermeneutic circle framework of the project, the specific methodology of the hermeneutic circle, and my view on being the participant of this methodology.

Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle methodology was chosen for this study because of the need for a text-based design that encouraged exploration and meaning-making. In a previous section of this paper I referenced the fact that hermeneutic philosophy is especially well-suited for a review of *The Heroine's Journey*, because they are both based on spiritual ideologies. This held true throughout the data collection. The hermeneutic circle highlights personal interpretations through spiritual identity and exploration which is also what was discovered while delving into *The Heroine's Journey* text.

To expand on the parallels, the experience of using the hermeneutic circle was appropriate for a text that was split into different sections so neatly. Similar to *The Bible*, which is a commonly used as an example of the original use for hermeneutics, *The Heroine's Journey* is a singular book that is split into several 'chapters' or 'steps'. I found this helpful when moving between the text as a whole and then back into a section that was clearly defined. The experience of using the hermeneutic circle, which encouraged to move in and out of the whole text and then the section, gave me more freedom to discover what would fit my personal reflections and experiences better.

The final congruency between the hermeneutic circle and *The Heroine's Journey* is that they are both visually based on a circle or cycle. As I worked through the steps, I grappled with the concept of my own heroine's journey being life-long and potentially unending. The structure of the hermeneutic circle supported this process that does not have a destination in a way that other methodologies could not. The concept of a heroine's journey is cyclical, but not strictly categorical. There are ten steps, but these steps are subjective and bleed into each other, as evidenced by my process with the first step. I found some resonance within the ideas of the separation from the feminine, but ultimately, I was able to move back out and reassess my placement within the entire ten-steps, which the hermeneutic methodology allowed. More linear or empirically oriented methodologies would have not allowed for this adaptation in the midst of data collection, but instead would have considered this a failure.

While I consider the qualitative, subjective nature of hermeneutics valuable, it gives less traditional fact-based evidence than a quantitative methodology might. This is important to note in terms of applicability to others and to different situations, but through the transparency of my work in this study, I aimed to highlight the adaptability this methodology creates which heightens its power of generalizability.

Methodology

Art work. While the standard hermeneutic circle is textually based with the interpretations and reflections being done with the written word, I believe that my training in art therapy and the research presented in the literature review show that artwork adds a qualitatively different layer of meaning-making than text alone. Artwork adds a richness to the phenomenological experience of a heroine's journey.

My experience of creating the artwork was made smoother by limiting the art materials and through the structure provided by the altered book. The art materials I provided myself ranged from those with more structure like scissors, stamps, and stencils to those that allowed for less structured outcomes like paint, markers, and patterned paper. This range of materials helped me start the process of creation quicker than if I had the opportunity to choose from all the art materials available in my studio. I found myself drawn more to the structured materials in most of the artwork. Upon reflection, this penchant for structured materials could be a compensation for the unstructured process of both the heroine's journey and the hermeneutic process.

Overall, the addition of artwork into the hermeneutic circle was a personal success and helped identify certain unconscious thoughts and feelings that may not have come out from verbal or written dialogue alone.

Stream of consciousness. Creating a verbal stream of consciousness body of text was chosen for its power to circumvent some of the bias and vulnerability. This choice bolstered the study in two ways. First, it allowed for unedited thoughts and feeling to come through the transcription. This free flow of words decreased the bias implicit in being both the researcher and participant, because my unfiltered words were not edited for a specific outcome or desired result. By not going back to edit the transcripts, sans condensing them for ease of reading, I allowed a pure reflection to be created. There is still unconscious bias that my stream of consciousness is drawn from, but this type of phenomenological self-study is enriched by my biases for the purpose of raw data collection.

Second, the act of putting my unfiltered words into a research study gives me insight into the possible clinical applications and applicability to client needs. I experienced more

vulnerability in doing this step of the hermeneutic circle than in doing any other step. To record a train of thought caused anxiety because I was worried about presenting myself as unprofessional, unintelligent, or unrelatable. If one of the goals of this research is to develop this methodology for use in art therapy practice, this knowledge of vulnerability is a valuable insight for me to possess and share.

Re-reads. The re-reading of the text helped me to stay grounded during the process of interpretation. I found it was easy to get lost in reflecting and spiraling into my own thoughts and lose sight of the text. Having to re-read the text after the first three steps and before the last two was helpful because I could study the text with the new mindset that the artwork and stream of consciousness had given me. While this step did not necessarily produce any tangible results, it informed my later analysis by grounding it within the text again. Re-reading the text allowed for me to pull knowledge from the author while now incorporating my own experiences of interpretation into the following steps.

Poetry. The reasoning behind adding poetry as a layer for the hermeneutic circle was to enhance creativity in the interpretation. A typical reflection, such as in the sixth step of data analysis, depends on cognitive reasoning. Whereas poetry encourages creative thinking in the form of atypical word choices, rhythm, and abstract personal meaning.

While creating the poetry, I found myself focusing less on text-based interpretation and more on how the poem flowed, sounded, and if it was too abstract. I have written personal poetry before, so lack of experience was not an obstacle. While I am satisfied with the poems I wrote, the unstructured method I set up for this step brought hesitation and doubt. Expanding this idea into working with clients, a client who has had no poetic experience may be more overwhelmed than I was which is not conducive to the goals of personal exploration. To adapt to this step

while maintaining poetic reflection, future research could use a specific type of poem, such as a haiku which has a set pattern to follow. Or, if the altered book is used, then the participant could potentially create found poetry by cutting out words from pages of the book which are rearranged to form new meaning.

Data analysis. This step of the outlined methodology is the closest in process to the original hermeneutic method that historians have documented. There was a chance for me to practice using first person language in a structured and reflective way that the stream-of-consciousness did not reach. While each step of the hermeneutic circle is important in moving back towards the text, this one in particular holds the additional burden of discovering the next step. The questions and answers that arose during these analyses pushed me to understand how to adapt this methodology to gain the most insight in the following steps.

While originally these sections of reflection started out as stream of consciousness, the purpose of this step was to ultimately guide the next round, which meant editing, changing, and not placing a time limit on the writing process. This step is vital in the hermeneutic circle because it moves the circle in and out of the text bodies.

Participant

My overall experience with being the participant in this study was positive. I gained insight about my own heroine's journey and how it takes shape in my personal life. My original interest in this topic came from discovering *The Heroine's Journey* in a multicultural class and reading the entire book within two days. I was so moved by this piece of text that I changed my research completely to study this feminist novel.

During this study, I was interested to find out that the book I had read was not a step-by-step manual, but instead a guidebook for identifying different landmarks along the journey. This was especially evident when I started out at the first step and realized quickly that it was not where I was in life, which moved me back out into the whole text. The second piece of evidence toward this insight was during the final round, when I started to question what it would look like to “move on” to the next step, and what it had looked like for me to “move on” in my own life. I concluded that turning a page in the book to a new chapter is black and white, but this journey, and life in general, holds a lot of grey areas as we transition from one step to the next. While I still subscribe to the core message that the steps are sequential, in my experience they aren’t as compartmentalized in real life as they are in the text.

As a therapist, I am tasked with trying to understand what my clients are going through. Doing a self-study allowed me to find flaws and adjustments that need to be made before using this approach with clients in my future practice. That being said, because this was such a deeply personal study, there is inherent bias in my data collection, reflection, and desire to bring this insight to others. I am writing this at a time in history where women are making great strides towards equality and recognition, but I see a lot of these women achieving these successes by sacrificing their spiritual and mental well-being. I feel that to be respected as a professional, a researcher, and a therapist I must subscribe strictly to evidence-based practices. However, I have held on to the intuition that qualitative, anecdotal approaches can be valuable as well. While this approach may never be replicated and statistically significant, it has been significant to me, which in turn means I can offer a better therapeutic lens for my clients, which enriches the field of art therapy as a whole.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overarching purpose of this study was to learn about, and attach meaning to, my life experiences through a feminist lens. This study also hypothesized that this research would result in the framework of a self-exploration approach for art therapists to use with clients. The methodological approach was to integrate art, poetry, and stream of consciousness text into a hermeneutic circle process that explored *The Heroine's Journey*. This hermeneutic circle consisted of three rounds, each with six steps. The methodology was flexible and adaptable to the information collected in each round. The results of this study showed that integrating arts-based layers to the hermeneutic circle led to increased self-awareness and deep insight into the feminine and masculine natures within myself. Through the experience of this project, I have created the framework of an approach that encourages self-exploration, societal struggles, and an on-going process of finding and making meaning.

Recommendations

Art therapy applications. While this study was not true art therapy, because there was no therapeutic relationship, it did create a framework for therapeutic art which art therapists can use in practice. Through the systematic literature review, the rich historical methodology of the hermeneutic circle, and the need many art therapy clients have for self-exploration, this study provided the basis for future art therapy research utilizing *The Heroine's Journey* and the hermeneutic circle.

This approach is a large task to ask of a client: to read an entire book and then spend several weeks re-reading and reflecting. Therefore, it would require a certain type of population such as those with an interest in reading and the free-time to do it, and those who have an ability

for insight and self-reflection. Clinically speaking, this type of self-journey would be ideal for people who come to therapy seeking help finding their identity, or for those who find themselves feeling empty and lost in the world or those facing a major life change such as loss of loved one, career change, or becoming a parent.

A belief of mine that was cemented by this process is that the heroine's journey can be taken by people lying all across the continuum of gender. Men can benefit by finding their emotional feminine side and embracing their role as a 'man with heart', non-binary clients can benefit by finding comfort in the fluidity of roles and steps taken along this journey, and everyone can gain from learning to embrace the integration of feminine and masculine energies.

Future research. Future research regarding this topic may include researching and implementing other art applications and mediums. This study allowed me to create in an altered book format, which was chosen for symbolic reasons; and use a limited selection of art materials, which was chosen for the sake of time and to limit over-thinking. A different type of art, such as a large-scale canvas that is added to each round, or using the altered book but with unlimited materials, may elicit different responses. Additionally, while this research was a self-study, there would be merit in a replication study utilizing a participant that is not also the researcher. A case study would provide a strong base for the use of this approach in an art therapy setting where the therapist is guiding and observing alongside the client, but not actively participating themselves. Because of the flexibility inherent in this framework, it is recommended that future research continue to use the hermeneutic circle outlined in the methodology, but the steps may change depending on client, diagnosis, presenting concerns, and population.

CHAPTER VII. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A

Stream of Consciousness for Round 1 “Separating from the Feminine”

Okay so this is about separating from the feminine. The first step of the heroine’s journey. For whatever reason I always think about little girls who say that they aren’t like other girls and what they mean is they don’t like pink or glitter or nail polish or whatever. I was like that growing up. I wanted to be one of the boys. My brothers. I have three of them. I hated pink. I went camping and hate sour candies that burned my tongue and made me cry. I tore heads off my barbie dolls. I wanted to be cool like the boys. I didn’t want to throw like a girl. What’s wrong with throwing like a girl? Nothing! Girls can throw things! What’s wrong with pink? And glitter? Nothing! Except that glitter is a microplastic and kills turtles. Whatever. Not important. The heroine’s journey would explain my hatred of pink that at a young age I learned that women are weak, and women wear pink and so pink is weak. Pink is a color. It is a light version of the longest wave light of length we call red. It is no weaker than purple or blue or green. I used a lot of purple in my art. Why didn’t I use pink? I think it was too obvious. Pink is a polar color- it means femininity in most contexts. Purple and lilac can be royalty and richness, it has other meanings. Pink is pink. I felt overwhelmed. I still do. I have separated from the feminine, but I have already recognized that it’s stupid to do so. It wasn’t that easy of course. Doing this whole thesis is a way of practicing that masculine ways of thinking, which are quantitative and concrete and numerical and orderly, are not as high and mighty as I was taught in my research degree. But I still think they hold merit. But should I? I have so many feelings, how could that ever be research? How can these numbers I painted and sponged onto the sheet be equally as important as the river of thoughts and emotions that run through me? I have so many questions to go into

and how the hell am I supposed to do so? I have no idea. I want this to be read and to be a jumping off point for so much more research in my future. Am I being selfish by studying myself? Is that not what the Heroine's Journey preaches? To learn to come back inside the body, to feel the femininity given to me by my own mother and to learn, to discipline myself to simply be? That's what I want to do. That's what I want to give to the world. Peace of mind, body, and spirit. Such a lofty girl. I mean goal. I don't think I need to be studying this first step. I lived this first step. I recognized this first step already. Where do I go next?

APPENDIX B

Stream of Consciousness for Round 2 “The Heroine’s Journey”

“This week was about the entire heroine’s journey which was quite a task, but I guess it’s for the best in the end. The end is supposed to be finding balance between masculine and feminine. In at least one part of your life. Right now, for me, I’m trying to adjust my way of thinking in all ways of life. I want to recognize that when I hear someone say, “There’s no statistics to back it up.” Or “it’s anecdotal” about something, that I don’t dismiss it immediately but recognize the inherent value in life experiences and opinions. However, through my artwork last week I know that it’s easy for me to flood when I let go of too much structure and concrete thinking. That’s where the balance comes in, I suppose I do feel like I’ve realized the detrimental effects of the initial rejection of feminine ideals but going from one extreme to another is just as toxic. Femininity can be smothering, impulsive, and ungrounded, just as masculinity can be angry, violent, and unforgiving. I imagine that the balance will be wise, adaptable, and humble. I want to be living the balance, or at least know what the balance looks like. The heroine’s journey book just talks about how the balance can be found in one part of your life but the minute a new role comes into play, such as becoming a mother or a superior at work, or a role changes, such as divorce or illness, that this journey is going to start again as you find the balance of what society tells you this role will be and what you need this role to be. I don’t know what I need right now besides a long nap with a cool breeze. I do find myself trying to find the feminine more and more in things, and not just identifying the masculine because that is what will push me forward. I want to be comfortable just being, and Murdock does state that it is a discipline to do so, to just be is not a luxury. And with any discipline, there’s going to be a balance.”

APPENDIX C

Stream of Consciousness for Round 3 “Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine”

I really found myself diving into this artwork. That’s not to say that I wasn’t committed to the other pieces, but I felt a connection and drive to create this piece and understand it. When I’m creating and being mindful, I can follow my intuition and lean heavily into that feminine energy that encourages me to stop planning and just create. It makes me feel like I have finally found the stage that relates the most to my current life experiences, instead of trying to reach backwards or forwards into my life. I also felt comfortable using materials that I had been saving for something special, but I had been saving them for years, so I finally let myself use them and make this special. The reconnection with the feminine is not an easy process so far. There is still a lot of ingrained shame about wanting to use pink and flowers and supposedly unprofessional, unscholarly language in this thesis. That’s why I included the pieces of broken mirror. I wanted to show that I’m still taking a hard look at myself, but I need to break myself into pieces to do so. I have had to remind myself that nontraditional means, or feminine soft research, is just as valid. Ideally the end of my journey would show me a way to have thoughts that don’t need to be corrected, that I am integrated between concrete and fluidity easily. I wonder if that will ever be a real possibility though, or if that’s just a lofty dream. Can anyone say they control their thoughts completely? Is it enough to catch myself after an unhelpful thought or do I need to eliminate those all together? I have learned that the end of a journey isn’t always going to be clear cut. I might find the end of one part which jumpstarts a new journey into a new role, idea, or experience. That sounds exhausting, but I guess it’s life to continue to seek out a better life. But then, I also want to learn how to just exist and not be constantly seeking. Can I do both at the

same time? What will that look like? I guess this is me reaching into the next stages, the thoughts of what the healing the masculine, finding the man with heart, as Murdock says.